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## **Blighted Property Review Committee**

**Thursday, February 19, 2009**

### **Meeting Report**

**Committee Members Attending:** L. Olsen, M. Candelario, S. Fuhs, M. Wolfe, D. Luckey, W. Bealer

**Others Attending:** C. Younger, M. Mayes, L. Kelleher, D. Wright

Mr. Olsen called the meeting to order at 6:06 p.m. He announced that a quorum was present.

#### **Public Comment**

No one offered public comment

#### **Agenda and Minutes**

Mr. Olsen asked the Committee to review the agenda for this meeting and the minutes from the January meeting

Ms. Wolfe moved, seconded by Mr. Candelario, to approve the agenda for this meeting and the minutes from the January meeting.

#### **Introduction of CD Staff**

Mr. Mayes and Mr. Wright introduced themselves to the committee. Mr. Mayes stated that he is the new CD Director and Mr. Wright stated that he is the Housing Specialist, focusing on HOME, ESG and compliance with HUD regulations.

Mr. Mayes and Mr. Wright explained that they are both fairly new and expressed their belief in the mission of the committee. They expressed their desire to assist as the work of the committee moves forward. Mr. Wright noted their work on the Neighborhood Stabilization Program (NSP) grant application for \$5,000,000 through the PaDCED. They stated that Ms. DeGroote in the Finance Department assisted with the grant application.

Ms. Kelleher stated that the Mayor appointed Mr. Wright to replace Mr. Khokhar as committee staff.

### **Properties of Merit**

Mr. Bealer introduced Sam Bennett and Elizabeth Tran from Properties of Merit (POM). Ms. Tran distributed information packets on POM to the committee. Ms. Bennett stated that she learned about the committee's interest in the program through Eric Weiss and Mr. Bealer. She noted Mr. Weiss' high marks for the committee's focus and drive. She also noted her excitement about bringing Reading into the POM program.

Ms. Bennett took the committee through a power point presentation about POM. She explained that POM has a partnership with Home Depot. She noted that Home Depot has asked POM to begin a program in Reading. She explained that Home Depot provides \$6,000 in home improvement materials annually to each POM community, along with a volunteer network that helps the community complete the improvement projects. She explained that POM empowers the local community to revitalize their neighborhoods.

Ms. Bennett stated that POM recognizes property owners who keep their homes well maintained. She noted how this program encourages revitalization. She noted that during a walking tour with Mr. Bealer, they noticed that 124 Walnut Street is an exceptionally well maintained home located in a blighted neighborhood. She explained that POM would recognize the accomplishment of the owner of 124 Walnut. She provided some examples of properties in other POM communities that are recognized. She explained that POM uses a wide range of publicity approaches to bring community and media attention to these exceptional property owners.

Ms. Bennett explained that redevelopment focuses on bricks and mortar and POM addresses community action and behavior. She stated that the local POM program will be organized through a board that can be composed in a variety of ways. She noted that this board will continue its work even as local officials change.

Ms. Bennett stated that she started POM in her home town and then introduced it in several Pennsylvania communities such as Allentown, Philadelphia, Easton, Erie, Bucks County, Pittsburgh, etc. She added that the program in Allentown has been in place for 10 years. She explained how POM uses the Broken

Windows concept and described the three service corps in the POM program.

Mr. Fuhs inquired if a City contribution to the program is required. Ms. Bennett stated that the program is self funded. Mr. Fuhs questioned who runs the local program. Ms. Bennett stated that the local program is run by a board (minimum of four members) of local residents, one member serves as the point of contact.

Ms. Kelleher asked Ms. Bennett how long the program has been in place. Ms. Bennett stated that the program has been in place for approximately 23 years. She noted Governor Rendell's involvement and support for the program. She noted that the Governor assists the POM program with a state allocation. Ms. Kelleher inquired how the program will be affected when Governor Rendell leaves office. Ms. Bennett replied that POM will continue as it is not dependent on State funding.

Mr. Olsen and Mr. Fuhs inquired about the annual budget of POM. Ms. Bennett stated that POM has an annual budget of \$400,000. POM is self-funded and works to gather the necessary financial support. She noted that POM suggests that communities identify at least six target areas. She noted the importance of placing the program in areas that are historic districts, have community groups or have something that draws the neighbors together.

Ms. Bennett asked the committee if they would like to bring the program to Reading and described the need to obtain support of the Mayor and City Council. She explained that the program begins with a kick-off meeting that includes community leaders and residents. POM handles the invitations and organization. She suggested that Ms. Kelleher assist with this effort.

The committee agreed to move forward. Mr. Olsen and Ms. Kelleher stated that they will brief the Mayor's assistant and Managing Director tomorrow. Ms. Kelleher suggested having Ms. Bennett and Ms. Tran to the March work session, which will introduce the concept to the governing body and the public as work sessions are televised.

## **Updates**

### **Inclusion of ADD, OCR, Garden Properties, etc.**

Mr. Bealer reported that he is working to incorporate ADD, OCR, etc onto the blighted property map.

## **Grants**

Ms. Kelleher stated that she and Mr. Olsen are waiting to hear from the DCED regarding grant opportunities.

## **Target List Properties**

Mr. Olsen noted that Mr. Khokhar no longer works for the City. Ms. Kelleher asked Mr. Wright if he would be willing to take on this area and follow up with the committee. She explained that Mr. Khokhar would provide reports to the Committee. Inspections were coordinated by the Trades Office through Mr. Franco, who would include Property Maintenance Inspectors. Mr. Franco also mails the necessary notices and letters out to the target properties. Mr. Wright and Mr. Mayes agreed to handle this area.

Mr. Bealer distributed photographs of the targeted properties. He, Mr. Mayes, and Mr. Wright agreed to meet next week to review the progress on these properties.

Mr. Bealer reported the following about the target properties:

- 118 West Elm - signed a demolition waiver
- 155 Walnut - demolished
- 200 N Front - being transferred to OCR
- 343 McKnight - owner announced inability to rehabilitate

## **Other Business**

Mr. Olsen noted the need to form committees that will help move the group forward. He noted that the chairs of the committees can bring other community members, such as community leaders and City staff, into the mix. After some discussion the following committees were established:

- Grants - Mr. Olsen, Chair and Ms. Kelleher
- Codes - Mr. Bealer , Chair and Mr. Wright
- Education - Mr. Candelario, Chair
- Research - Ms. Wolfe, Chair

The matrix prepared to cover the process for the targeted properties by Ms. Kelleher was reviewed. Ms. Kelleher was asked to send the matrix to Mr. Wright.

At the next meeting the committee will discuss the process and actions used by Allentown and Harrisburg. The committee will also define the issues connected to each target property so that the Determination Notices can be issued.

Mr. Candelario moved, seconded by Mr. Luckey, to adjourn the meeting.

*Respectfully submitted by Linda A. Kelleher CMC, City Clerk*

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## **FOLLOW-UP ISSUES**

### **Follow-up Issues:**

- Update map to include OCR, ADD, Community Gardens, etc – W. Bealer
  - Grants – L. Olsen & L. Kelleher
  - Update on 22 target properties – W. Bealer & D. Wright
  - Review Blighted Property Process
  - Define issues connected w/ target properties and finalize determination letters
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